

DISASTER RECOVERY PRIORITIES

The Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition of more than 700 local, state, and national organizations urges Congress to ensure that federal disaster recovery resources reach all impacted households, including those with the lowest incomes who are often the hardest-hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover afterwards.

Below are our top priorities for Congress to include in the final Fiscal Year 2018 spending bills.

PROVIDE HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH THE GREATEST NEEDS.

It has been nearly six months since the first hurricane made landfall, and FEMA still refuses to put in place proven long-term housing solutions, like DHAP, to help low income survivors get back on their feet. More than 10,000 families spread across 40 states and Puerto Rico remain in hotels under FEMA's TSA hotel program. Thousands more low income families have been unable to access transitional shelter assistance due to financial and other barriers, including the practice of participating hotels charging daily "resort" fees and requiring security deposits or credit cards.

FEMA's failure to prioritize DHAP is compounded by recent and looming deadlines that have abruptly ended TSA for displaced Puerto Rican families in [Connecticut](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Massachusetts](#), [New York](#), [Florida](#), and other states. Without long-term housing solutions in place, like DHAP, these families have resorted to couch-surfing, sleeping in cars, paying at least half of their income on rent, or to returning to their uninhabitable homes on the island with just a few days' notice.

Despite a clear need and ample evidence of DHAP's effectiveness after previous disasters, FEMA has so far been unwilling to enter into an agreement with HUD to stand up the program. Because of FEMA's inaction, low income survivors are facing predictable and preventable crises in having to choose between living in unhealthy and unsafe homes or paying far too much of their limited incomes on rent, making it harder to meet their other basic needs. For more information, see [NLIHC's factsheet on the DHAP program](#).

Priority #1: Include legislative language to direct FEMA to enter into an interagency agreement (IAA) with HUD to stand up the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP).

Priority #2: Extend FEMA's TSA program to prevent increased risk of homelessness among displaced survivors.

ENSURE THAT FEDERAL DISASTER RECOVERY DOLLARS ARE USED EQUITABLY TO ADDRESS HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS.

Congress relies on FEMA and HUD's unmet needs assessment to determine the amount of disaster recovery funding needed to rebuild damaged and destroyed homes and infrastructure. However, states are not required by law to spend federal disaster recovery resources to address these unmet needs. After past disasters, states have used dollars slated for housing recovery for other purposes. Congress has an important role to play to ensure that federal dollars are spent effectively and for the specific purpose for which they were allocated.



Flooding damage and recovery in the Lakewood Area of Houston, TX.

Photo: Revolution Messaging/Arun Chaudhary

Priority #3: Include legislative language to require states to receiving federal disaster recovery funding to allocate these resources to address the housing and infrastructure needs, according to FEMA and HUD's assessment.

ENSURE THAT FEDERAL DISASTER RECOVERY DOLLARS ARE USED EQUITABLY TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF HOMEOWNERS, RENTERS, AND PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

Under current law, states are not required to allocate federal disaster recovery funding to address the needs of homeowners, renters, and people experiencing homelessness prior to the disaster as identified in FEMA and HUD's assessment. As a result, after past disasters, states have diverted resources away from people with the greatest needs – including low income renters and people experiencing homelessness – to relatively higher income homeowners. In a 2010 report, GAO recommended that Congress provide more direction to states in how to allocate funds from the CDBG-DR program. The report concludes, "Without specific direction on how to better target disaster-related CDBG funds for the redevelopment of homeowner and rental units after future disasters, states' allocations of assistance to homeowners and renters may again result in significant differences in the level of assistance provided."

Priority #4: Include legislative language implementing the GAO's recommendation to provide states with specific direction on how to allocate disaster recovery dollars equitably between homeowners, renters, and people experiencing homelessness prior to the disaster. In the alternative, Congress should require states to demonstrate to HUD that they have allocated federal disaster recovery funding to address the needs of homeowners, renters, and people experiencing homelessness prior to the disaster as identified in FEMA and HUD's assessment.

REQUIRE ALL DAMAGED OR DESTROYED FEDERALLY SUBSIDIZED AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOMES TO BE REPLACED ON A ONE-FOR-ONE BASIS.

Even before the recent disasters, Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and California suffered from some of the most severe shortages of affordable rental homes for people with the greatest needs. As a result, the majority of the lowest income families living in these communities paid more than half of their limited incomes on rent, leaving few resources to help meet their other basic needs, including food, childcare, healthcare, and transportation. After past disasters, affordable housing stock is often lost and never rebuilt, exacerbating the affordable rental housing crisis in these communities. Developments should be rebuilt in both high-opportunity communities outside of the flood plain with access to good schools, jobs, healthcare, and transit, and in distressed communities as part of a comprehensive revitalization plan.

Priority #5: Include legislative language requiring that states receiving CDBG-DR funding ensure that all damaged or destroyed federally subsidized affordable rental homes are replaced on a one-for-one basis. Priorities for funding should be given to rebuild damaged and destroyed public housing and other federally subsidized affordable housing developments.

SUPPORT INNOVATIVE, COST-EFFECTIVE HOUSING SOLUTIONS.

RAPIDO was developed after Hurricane Dolly to provide displaced households with temporary-to-permanent housing solutions. Under RAPIDO, families have access to a core, modular home – assembled on-site – where they can live during the lengthy recovery process. During this time, the core home can be expanded to meet the long-term needs of the family. RAPIDO provides both immediate shelter and the foundation for a permanent home. It is an innovative solution that costs less than current federal practices of providing temporary shelter and then rebuilding a separate, permanent structure at a later date.

Recommendation #6: Include legislative language to allow states to use federal recovery resources to create a RAPIDO demonstration program.

PROMOTE CONTRACTING AND JOBS FOR LOW INCOME DISASTER SURVIVORS AND BUSINESSES.

To help stimulate local economies and ensure that low income communities are built back stronger, Congress should provide job training and employment opportunities to low income residents and contract opportunities to small businesses in connection with projects and activities in their neighborhoods.

Recommendation #7: *Include legislative language to direct states to include measures to promote job training and employment opportunities for low income residents in state action plans.*